

Mr. Speaker, I oppose the combined D.C./Commerce-Justice-State Appropriations Conference Report.

- Attaching the DC appropriations to the larger Commerce--Justice--State bill once again does a great disservice to the people of the District. The DC portion of the conference report is a great improvement over the version passed earlier by the House. It includes provisions that increase funding for two projects that I have strongly supported: \$25 million for the New York Avenue Metro Station, and \$3 million for environmental clean-up of Popular Point along the Anacostia River. Both projects are top priorities for residents and the City to help spur new economics development activity for the District. Combining it with the larger Commerce-Justice-State bill, which contains provisions wholly unacceptable to the President, means that once again the District is being held hostage to Congressional tactics. It is unnecessary and it is wrong!

- This bill fails to include critical provisions that would bring fairness and justice to our nation's immigration laws. Last month, I joined 154 other House Democrats in sending a letter to President Clinton promising to sustain a veto of this bill should the Republican majority fail the Hispanic community yet again. While Republicans speak of compassion, their actions tear families apart and support inequalities in our laws. The Latino and Immigrant Fairness act (LIFA) provisions are critically-needed pieces of legislation that would bring fairness to families and individuals who call America home, and who have made significant social, economic, and political contributions to our nation.

- I am cosponsoring legislation calling for all three of LIFA's provision: to allow those who qualify for permanent residency to complete the final stages of their application in the U.S. rather than returning to their country of origin; to provide Central American and Caribbean immigrants who have been here since 1995 the right to apply for permanent residency (as is the case for Cubans and Nicaraguans); and to update the 'registry date' which would allow immigrants here since 1986 to apply for permanent residency. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership will not permit a vote on our legislation and attaching it to appropriations legislation is the only way this Congress can provide justice to these families.

- I am also disappointed about the failure of this conference report to include the hate crimes enhancement law as the Administration had requested. Along with more than 190 Members of the House from both parties, I cosponsored the legislation to extend current federal hate crimes law to cover violence motivated by prejudice against the victim's sexual orientation, gender or liability. It will not become law this year because Republican leaders have shown once again that they are opposed to passing the legislation in any form. We have a long way to go on to ensure the safety on all citizens. I will continue to support efforts to fight hate crimes and discrimination.

- This legislation also does a disservice to the environment. Section 636 of the bill would prevent the Cuyahoga Valley National Park from gaining stronger clean air protections. Provisions in the bill also allow Coastal Impact Assistant funds to be used for environmentally damaging projects and activities, making a mockery of ongoing efforts to restore our endangered coastal areas.